KRONSTADT
1917–1921

THE FATE OF A SOVIET DEMOCRACY

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A sailors' Sakhalin

Kronstadt, fortress, naval base and port town on the island of Kotlin in the Gulf of Finland, situated some twenty miles from Petersburg and protecting the capital from the sea, entered the Russian February revolution of 1917 with a population of some 82,000 (20,000 soldiers, 12,000 sailors and 50,000 civilian inhabitants)[1] and a formidable reputation for severe regimentation, revolutionary unrest, mutiny and repression, and thorough disaffection.

While some revolutionary cells seem to have been active in the Torpedo and Gunnery Training Detachments there since 1902,[2] Kronstadt's first major flare-up – the mutiny of October 1905 – was spontaneous, its riotous course and pogrom-like outcome reflecting its 'elemental' rather than political character.

True, in the background there loomed the shattering news of the Tsushima Straits disaster of 14 May 1905, when the larger part of the Baltic Fleet, sent to the Far East as the Second Pacific Squadron, was sunk by the Japanese with the loss of 4,500 men. Nearer home, there was the heroic example of the crew's revolutionary takeover of the battleship *Potemkin* in June and its spectacularly defiant eleven-day cruise in the Black Sea under the red flag. In the Baltic, the depots of the naval base of Libau rose on 15 June, while on 4 July there was unrest on the battleship *Slava* at Reval. But the long-standing and now seething discontent in Kronstadt was essentially non-political.

Bad food, maltreatment by officers who meted out savage beatings and harsh punishments for trifling misdemeanours, and humiliating prohibitions were the lot of the Kronstadt sailors. The town's parks and public squares, taverns and tea-houses, theatres and markets, as well as the sunny side of the central boulevards,

were all out of bounds for the lower ranks. In Peer Park, alongside the notice 'Do not bring dogs into the park', hung another, arrogantly proclaiming, 'Soldiers and sailors are strictly barred from entry'.[3]

The accumulated discontent burst into the open in the wake of Tsar Nicholas II's manifesto of 17 October 1905 which, marking the beginning of Russia's short-lived era of semi-constitutionalism, granted an elective Duma and a measure of civil liberties. With the local authorities failing to 'explain to the people the true significance of the conferred liberties' (as the chief naval court put it on 11 January 1906),[4] on 23 October a crowd of some 5,000 sailors, soldiers, high school students and civilians gathered in Kronstadt's vast Anchor Square to hear how the October Manifesto's promised liberties would affect them. Couched in moderate, restrained language, the Petition to the Tsar that they then adopted insisted on their rights as 'Russian citizens' and 'defenders of the fatherland' to assemble and discuss matters of common interest, to spend their free time as they saw fit and not, 'like serfs', to have to 'ask permission for everything', and to purchase wine, since, they argued, 'sailors are not like children under parental supervision'. They also demanded the removal of notices which placed sailors and soldiers 'on a par with dogs', a reduction in the seven-year term of naval service (soldiers served five years), decent food and uniforms, and a rise in sailors' wages.

Politically, the petition sought the abolition of estates, 'so that all be equal', freedom of religion, the right of nationalities and ethnic minorities to 'education in one's own national language', freedom of speech, including the right to speak freely to superiors rather than in the rigid rubrics of 'Yes, indeed', 'No, certainly not', and 'Is present', and personal inviolability, so that 'they cannot simply come and grab a defenceless sailor and jail him'.[5]

The Anchor Square meeting also heard the Bolshevik party worker Iosif Dubrovinsky and the Socialist Revolutionary activist Pavel Tolmachev denounce the Manifesto as a deceit cunningly designed to rescue the frightened and tottering tsarist regime. While Tolmachev called for the overthrow of the autocracy and the destruction of the new constitution, since 'We need a Republic!', Dubrovinsky appealed to the crowd for direct action: 'Comrades, sailors and soldiers! You, who have revolutionary consciousness, you also have battleships, cannons, machine-guns and rifles, therefore –

long live the general armed uprising!'[6] But the meeting dispersed peacefully although, in the evening, some gunners and soldiers smashed up brothels, while others assaulted or threw stones at passing officers.

When Kronstadt's governor and chief commander, Vice-Admiral K. P. Nikonov, made the rounds of the sailors' depots and army units on 24 and 25 October, asking to be told their 'needs and grievances', the demands he heard were invariably for 'decent food' and 'decent outfits' and for 'personal eating utensils', since 'ten people are fed from one pot, the sick together with the healthy, while because of that, some do not eat at all and simply waste away'. However, one sailor, A. Kotlov of the Fifth Naval Depot, having been promised 'complete immunity', took Nikonov at his word and spelled it all out:

> We are hurt at every step, your Highness. We are treated like beasts. Our officers never have a friendly word for us but always bark; their rudeness cuts us to the quick, for it is as if they set out deliberately to rob us of our human dignity. Some do not content themselves with merely being rude, but slap our faces and, for good measure, pile on exaggerated punishments. The sergeant-majors have been told, 'Beat those sons of bitches, harder and smartly.'

Kotlov adduced in evidence a considerable number of cases of physical violence by sergeant-majors that had been so severe as to lead to the hospitalization of their victims.[7] Nikonov listened attentively though somewhat incredulously, and finally exhorted the men, 'Don't listen to evil-minded persons who incite you to break your oath and engage in disorders.' Alarmed by what he had heard, he urgently ordered reinforcements from Petersburg. But they arrived too late.[8]

The next day, some fifty soldiers of the Second Kronstadt Infantry Battalion, about to march out to work, insisted first on presenting a statement of their grievances and demands to the regiment commander, Colonel Osipov. Refused permission, they promptly began to riot, shouting, 'Liberty! All are equal now! We need no officers!' Arrested and taken under convoy to the railway station for transport to an outlying fort, they appealed to a crowd of sailors, gunners and civilians who were themselves busy breaking into a wine store: 'Brothers, they are going to slaughter us, help!' When the crowd tried to free them, the guards opened fire, killing one sailor and seriously wounding another. An irate sailor crowd now abandoned

all restraint and, raising the sailors of the Third, Fifth and Tenth Naval Depots and the gunners of the Gunnery Training Detachment and seizing all the rifles they found in the arsenal of the Seventh Naval Depot, they stormed into the streets, shouting 'Hoorah!' and singing revolutionary songs. Leaderless, with no plans and encountering no resistance – the police, fearing for their lives, had simply vanished, while the officers made for their homes to take their families to safety on the mainland – they roamed the streets aimlessly. Joined, if not prodded on, by the most dubious civilian elements, they broke into the officers' messes and wine shops, got themselves drunk, smashed street lanterns, set fire to houses and shops and, when the fire brigade arrived, slashed the water hoses. A majority of Kronstadt's garrison of 13,000 sailors and soldiers, seven out of the twelve depots, joined in the arson, pillage and drunken orgy, while the half-squadron of dragoons sent to bring the rampaging crowds to their senses did nothing, their commander, Captain Silman, not daring to order them to open fire lest they disobey his command. Only when the troops that Nikonov had ordered from Petersburg arrived on 28 October was the mutiny suppressed. Sixteen sailors and one civilian lay dead, and seventy-five sailors, twelve soldiers and seventeen civilians were wounded.[9]

Though the majority of the Kronstadt garrison had participated in the mutiny, and some 3,000 had actually been arrested, a mere 208 were brought to trial; of these, eighty-four were acquitted and only forty-one were found guilty of mutiny; but none were sentenced to death and only one to *katorga* (hard labour) for life. One reason for the surprisingly lenient treatment of the Kronstadt mutineers may have been the general strike of Petersburg workers who, on 1 November, protested the courts martial and the death penalty and loudly proclaimed their support for 'the brave soldiers and sailors of Kronstadt who rose in defence of their rights and the people's freedom'.[10] But there was, too, the tsarist authorities' desire to damp down the excitement and the universal discontent in the navy (which even they realized were justified), and, more importantly, to depoliticize them, an aim they sought to achieve by treating the Kronstadt mutiny as a mere drunken riot.

But the men of Kronstadt, too, could learn the lesson of the mutiny. If the few Socialist Revolutionary and Bolshevik activists there, who had been working since the summer of 1905, saw to their horror how a spontaneous and leaderless mutiny could degenerate

into an 'imbecile, wild and drunken pogrom',[11] the 'United Committee of the Kronstadt Military-Revolutionary Organization' (which came into being during the early months of 1906 with Socialist Revolutionaries predominating) made sure that the growing resentment and rebelliousness of the garrison would never again prematurely explode or waste itself in brawls between soldiers and sailors or wild raids on wine shops. Indeed, it posted special squads to patrol the major streets on public holidays and keep the peace.[12]

Kronstadt's July 1906 uprising was the work of this United Committee. It was planned to coincide with revolts in the other three Baltic fleet bases, at Sveaborg (Helsingfors), Reval and Libau and, coming in the wake of resentment created by the angry tsar's dissolution of the oppositional First Duma on 9 July 1906, was intended to re-ignite the revolution in Petersburg and then the whole of Russia.

While the leadership of the uprising was Socialist Revolutionary (the Bolshevik minority in the United Committee gave only last-minute support), and its ideology and battle-cry 'For Land and Liberty!', 'For the Motherland and the Peasant Folk!' was clearly populist, its mood was violently anti-officer. Indeed, hatred of officers, castigated as 'dragons' and 'bloodsuckers', was so ferocious that when, a few days before the uprising, the question of the officers' fate was discussed in one of the naval depots, sailors were unanimous: officers must be killed. 'We discussed them one by one, and found none deserving of our confidence or simple mercy', the sailor Nikolai Egorov recorded soon after. In fact, he remembered the 'officer question' being a major and frequent bone of contention between the sailors and their mentors, the SR intellectuals who came to organize them.

> We were in agreement and lived in harmony with them, but on this one question we never saw eye to eye. They insisted there was no need to kill the officers, that it would be sufficient to arrest them and thus render them incapable of opposing the uprising . . . But we would not budge and thought that any possible sympathizer would long ago have revealed himself by kindness and would not have remained a true servant of the government. As for those who might come over to our side, they would do this only out of fear. Why bother then about their possible sympathy or assistance. To hell with them all![13]

The debate continued up to the very eve of the uprising when, on 17 July, the navy and army delegates met to discuss 'the plan' and

its execution. 'Precious hours were wasted', the sailor A. Piskarev complained, in a debate over whether the officers were to be 'killed or merely arrested', with the 'mankind-loving Mensheviks' incurring the 'displeasure of the sailors and workers' because of their spirited defence of the officers. In the end, a compromise was reached to 'deal with the officers according to circumstances'.[14]

Badly planned and haphazardly prepared, the uprising began at 11 p.m. on 19 July, and was defeated by the next morning. Everything went wrong. The Sveaborg revolt, which began on 17 July, was already put down before the Kronstadters had even moved, while the Reval and Libau bases and the ships of the Baltic Fleet remained altogether quiet, except for a short-lived mutiny on the cruiser *Pamiat' Azova*. Worst of all, the little-propagandized Eniseisk Infantry Regiment stationed in Kronstadt, on which the United Committee had relied for support and very badly needed rifles (sailors were kept unarmed), would not join in. Nor did the band of SR-Maximalist terrorists, who had promised to bring revolvers and bombs, arrive.[15] When the sailors' call, 'Comrades, join us, we stand for Land and Liberty!', was answered by the men of the Eniseisk regiment with a volley of bullets, the fate of Kronstadt's 'unarmed' uprising was sealed, and it was easily and almost bloodlessly suppressed.

Of the nine killed during the uprising, four were officers, one a civilian, and only four were sailors; while of the twenty wounded, at least four were officers. Small wonder that Captain Muravev, a member of an investigatory commission on the uprising, complained: 'One cannot help noticing the pathetically small number of mutineers killed during the suppression of the mutiny. It is an alarming sign: the troops shot into the air and not at the rebels, and mutineers may take advantage of this in the future.'[16]

A series of bloody reprisals began immediately on 20 July, with the summary execution by firing squad of seven torpedo-men who were accused of having shot both their new commander, Captain Vrochinsky, and their former commander, Colonel Alexandrov, together with his mistress. Vice-Admiral A. Adlerberg, the commandant of the fortress, who supervised the execution, is reported to have ordered the torpedo-men to dig their own graves: 'Dig, lads, dig, here's your "Land" for you! And as for "Liberty", you'll find that in heaven!'

In a poem which appeared soon after in *Soldatskaia mysl'*, the organ

of the military section of the party of Socialist Revolutionaries, Adlerberg was told:

> Rejoice not yet, perfidious, cruel, old rascal:
> 'Land and People's Liberty!'
> Still resounds our battle-cry!
> This to your bullets is our reply!

For the simple soldiers of the firing squad they had another message:

> Get ready, take aim, straight and true,
> Your years of slavery will soon be through,
> Farewell, lads! Long live Holy Russia!
> Land and the People's Liberty![17]

Another seven torpedo-men and three civilians accused of the murder of officers were court-martialled and executed on 7 August. One of the condemned, the student Aram Ter-Marchiants, an SR activist, died shouting, 'Down with the autocracy! Death to the tyrants!'[18]

But it was the execution of nineteen sailors on 21 September which became a major chapter in Kronstadt's rich revolutionary martyrology. Active leaders of the uprising, the majority refused religious rites and the apposition of the Cross and sang the revolutionary Funeral March while the sentence was read out to them. The firing squad must have faltered: only three or four sailors died in the first volley. Even after the second, there were still some left who had to be shot with revolvers.[19]

A total of some 3,000 sailors, 200 torpedo-men, 100 sappers and 80 civilians were tried in Kronstadt in the wake of the uprising. Of these, 1,451 received various terms of imprisonment, 180 were condemned to various terms of *katorga* and 36 were executed. A total of 2,127 were registered as 'politically unreliable' and were gradually drafted from Kronstadt and the Baltic Fleet into special punitive detachments or army units as far away as Archangelsk, Tambov or the Caucasus. Even the silent majority which had not joined in the uprising, but had done nothing to prevent it, were demoted by two ranks.[20]

Both the scale and the ferocity of the punishments meted out to the Kronstadters in 1906 and 1907 were quite unprecedented and in stark contrast with the mild treatment of the mutineers and pogromists of October 1905. The new policy of ruthless 'pacification', of drumhead court martials and gallows – the notorious 'Stolypin neckties' – adopted by the tsarist authorities after the dissolution of

the First Duma on 9 July 1906 may partly explain this turn-about, but more important was their panic-stricken realization that at least three-quarters of Kronstadt sailors were 'seized with the intoxication of the liberation movement, ready for any kind of revolutionary action, and only still afraid because they are not sure of the sympathy of the garrison's soldiers'. Yet Kronstadt soldiers were none too reliable either. A letter which the Minister for War, Alexander F. Rediger, received on 23 July 1906 from 'two hundred and seven class-conscious soldiers', drove the point home:

> Listen, Minister Rediger. We, 71 conscious sailors and 136 conscious infantry soldiers, assembled in a forest, have sworn to avenge our seven court-martialled and executed comrades. How shall we avenge them? We will avenge them thus: for every comrade soldier killed, we will hang three officers edgewise, and shoot another five. Report that to the tsar! Yet our superiors regard us as the most reliable![21]

The main lesson which the tsarist authorities characteristically drew from the Kronstadt mutinies of 1905 and 1906 was the need to enlarge and tighten the system of police surveillance still further, 'insulate that stronghold of the capital from agitators and other evil elements', and make sure that 'not one person could penetrate unnoticed into the fortress, the port or the barracks'.[22]

With the appointment in 1909 of Vice-Admiral Robert N. Viren as military governor of Kronstadt and chief commander of its port, Kronstadt's system of strict regimentation, thorough surveillance and brutal punishment reached its apogee. Kronstadt, already in disrepute because of its prison dungeons and punitive detachments, now became known and dreaded as a 'sailors' Sakhalin', a Baltic echo of Russia's notorious penal island in the Far East.

Born in 1856 into a Lutheran, Finno-Swedish family, a hero of Port Arthur and the Russo-Japanese war, by 1907 Viren had already distinguished himself by his relentless and ruthless suppression of subversion as chief commander of the Black Sea Fleet and governor general of Sebastopol. The captain of the destroyer *Novik*, G. K. Graf, who admired him for his courage and dedication to the monarchy, nevertheless remembered him as a martinet of martinets:

> He was by nature straight, imperious and courageous, but also boundlessly strict and demanding. He would implacably note trifles and mercilessly scolded anybody and at any occasion. It was quite impossible to please him: this was bad, and that was not much good, one could expect no quarter from him . . . At the very sight of the chief commander, sailors

would run for their lives as though possessed and try to hide their caps into the bargain, since for the most trifling dereliction he would demand the man's cap, note the number, and have the culprit found.[23]

While that was the comment of a monarchist officer, to an intelligent and alert sailor such as Grigorii Kononov Kronstadt's 'devilish *katorga*-like regime', over which Viren hovered like an 'evil genius', appeared to have been specially invented to 'humiliate and insult' the lower ranks and 'break their human dignity and self-respect'. The moment Kononov was drafted into the navy and even while he was still in Petersburg on his way to Kronstadt, he was told, 'They'll squeeze your juices out of you there!' 'They'll drill you there all right!', as if he were being drafted into a 'punitive battalion'. In Kronstadt, the 'reality was even worse than his expectations': Viren's wife, 'the *admiralshchina*', not to speak of the senior officers and even some of their wives, too, took delight in pulling up sailors who happened to walk on 'the wrong [i.e. sunny] side of the boulevard' and asking for their names and numbers. Thus 'scoffed at', Kononov remembered 'biting his lips bloody' in impotent rage. Yet with all public places and parks out of bounds and visits to private homes strictly prohibited – the offending sailor was liable to thirty days lockup and his host to three months in prison and deportation from Kronstadt – there was little else that a sailor could do with his leave, according to both Graf and Kononov, except walk the streets.[24]

Small wonder that when the battleships *Imperator Pavel I* and *Andre Pervozvannyi* were moored in the Kronstadt harbour for nearly a week in the spring of 1913, only a very few sailors dared go ashore for fear they might be spotted by Viren and his officers, rebuked and thus lose their shore leave in Reval.[25]

Yet the 20,000 or so soldiers and sailors who constituted the Kronstadt garrison in the years before World War I (by February 1917 their number had grown to almost 20,000 soldiers in the Kronstadt fortress and 12,000 naval forces, of whom no less than 7,100 were in training units and training ships, with 4,800 in shore units)[26] were probably the most literate, technically skilled and modern, the most ethnically Russian, least servile and the most disaffected of all Russia's armed forces.

For, having embarked on a vast and very ambitious naval construction programme with the object of creating, within a decade and almost from scratch, a new, powerful, modern navy, 'of a

strength and power that will befit the dignity and glory of Russia' and more than match the formidable German navy in the Baltic, the tsarist authorities faced a recruitment problem and found that 'in view of the special complexity of the modern battleship, the Russian peasant, straight from the *sokha* [wooden plough] cannot immediately become a sailor, while it is the working element that is somewhat prepared for the handling of machines'.[27]

This 'working element' was found so indispensable for the manning and servicing of Russia's modern navy, notably of its latest Dreadnought battleships, that of those drafted into the Baltic Fleet between 1904 and 1916, industrial workers formed the largest group (31%), workers in building and light industry, unskilled labourers and boatmen made up 23%, artisans, tradesmen, employees and miscellaneous groups another 21%, and peasants only 25%. In the same period, a mere 3.43% of army recruits were factory workers.[28]

But while these working-class naval recruits, 84% of whom were fully literate, with another 10% semi-literate (in the army call-up of 1903, 44.5% were illiterate, while in 1913, illiterates were still 32.2%),[29] were regarded as indispensable, they were also suspected of being politically unreliable, if not disaffected. Indeed the director of the Police Department advised against 'the recruitment into the navy of draftees who have completed lower technical schools, factory and railway schools, as well as former factory workers, locksmiths, foundry workers, electricians, fitters, telegraphists and other tradesmen who, together with their specialist course, have also gone through the corrupting school of the factory atmosphere'. For, in his opinion, such recruits would 'bring into the navy a vast battery of anti-militarist ideas, contempt for military service, and a hostile attitude to all authority absorbed from the age of 12–15 since when they have moved amidst propagandized workers'.[30]

Indeed, with the Kronstadt naval base forming the major training centre of the Baltic Fleet, most of the new recruits were, after some six months of infantry drill, assigned to one of the many training companies or schools to become artificers, stokers, gunners, torpedomen, telegraphists, electricians, divers, clerks or medical orderlies. They attended classes in general studies and Russian language, arithmetic, physics, mechanics, electro-technology, and radio-telegraphy.[31] Yet, as some Kronstadt naval officers complained in 1913, training recruits, 'already poisoned with [revolutionary] propaganda', in barracks and classrooms rather than on board ships was

not conducive to their 'education' in loyalty and patriotism; that could only be given by identification with 'the glorious military past', the banners and symbols of a particular ship or regiment, they urged.[32]

Moreover, the ablest and better educated, who were given an additional year of training to qualify as petty-officers and instructors, thus received an education well above average which turned them, as Captain Graf peevishly noted, 'into half-intellectuals'.[33] As for qualified sailors, a significant proportion travelled abroad on the annual summer cruises of the Baltic Fleet to the ports of Western Europe and the Mediterranean, and may well have compared their servile lot and tsarist police state with what they saw there.

Yet this alert, skilled and modern lower deck confronted a caste-like naval officers corps, most of whom were the 'blue-blooded' sons of the hereditary gentry, often of the Baltic German nobility, and graduates of the very exclusive Naval Cadet Corpus in Petersburg.[34] Haughty and educated in unquestioning loyalty to the tsar, they had been trained to demand absolute obedience and subservience from the 'lower ranks'. The contempt and distrust of officers for men was only exceeded by the sailors' bitter hatred for an officer class which they saw as the mainstay of Kronstadt's formidable network of political surveillance headed by Colonel V. V. Trzhetsiak, chief of the Kronstadt Gendarmerie Administration, and the indefatigable captain of the gendarmerie, Vladimir Vladimirovich Vladimirov. As the sailors sneered: 'In the Naval Cadet Corpus they don't train officers for ships, but for the Police Department!' Officers and men were certainly worlds apart and the chasm that divided them reflected the basic dilemma of Russia's modernization under tsarist auspices.

The town itself had a substantial industrial work force of some 13,000 by 1911 (17,000 by June 1917), employed in the shipyards, the huge dry-docks, the steamship plant, the arsenal, the chemical laboratories, the sawmill and the twenty-three workshops of the Naval Administration, the privately owned cable factory, and the numerous workshops producing goods ranging from simple chandlery to sophisticated diving equipment, the large timber and coal yards adjacent to the mercantile port which handled timber exports of more than 10 million roubles a year and coal imports of 1.5 million tons a year (the Petersburg port handled only half a million tons of coal a year), the municipal gas company and electric power station.[35]

Kronstadt's workers were thus, like industrial workers all over Russia, a primary and attractive target for the SRs, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, whose success was such that at least 1,000 workers of the steamship plant were reported and promptly dismissed for celebrating the first of May in 1907.[36]

But Viren's tight *cordon sanitaire* kept revolutionary agitators out and effectively silenced all organized revolutionary activity among Kronstadt's workers. Under a system of registration of workers, already operating for naval recruits, employers with government contracts – the large majority of Kronstadt's privately owned sector – cooperated fully with the political gendarmerie and, with their help, kept dossiers on the political reliability of workers. Employees regarded as 'unreliables' were put under surveillance and gradually made to leave the town.[37]

The Kronstadt system of registration and surveillance of both workers and naval recruits was, thanks to the close and unprecedented cooperation of Governor Viren and the chief of the gendarmerie, so successful that it was held up as a model for Sveaborg, Reval and Libau at the January 1913 conferences of gendarmerie and police chiefs of the Baltic provinces, convened to devise measures 'for the prevention of the penetration of criminal propaganda from without into the ships of the Baltic Fleet'.[38]

As for the local intelligentsia – the teachers of Kronstadt's four high schools, the medical personnel of its two hospitals, the numerous engineers and the student sons and daughters of the large body of officials of the naval and military establishments and of the Ministry of Trade and Industry – they were singularly apathetic and apolitical. They were thus perfectly in tune with Kronstadt's dull, stuffy, very provincial and fragmented society in which Viren's dour, parsimonious and withdrawn life-style – he held no receptions, did not mix at balls and soirées, supported no associations and clubs except some philanthropic and temperance societies – set the tone. There was no local theatre or opera, the large and impressive naval library was controlled by the naval establishment and the two local 'navy and town' newspapers (the *Kronshtadtskii vestnik* and the *Kotlin*) were conservative-loyalist and close to the Naval Ministry, while the municipal Duma was dominated by merchants of the first and second guilds, and ennobled citizens and retired army and navy officers and officials. Small wonder that more alert members of the intelligentsia and young officials tended to regard their jobs and their stay in

Kronstadt as a temporary necessity, and, as Foma Parchevsky who arrived in 1912 to teach in a local high school observed, spent their time thinking 'how to get out of Kronstadt as soon as possible'.[39] Of the more alienated sons and daughters of officialdom and intelligentsia, the Okhrana (political police) recorded in early 1911 the existence of one radical circle with SR connections which, under the cover of the study of Esperanto, and under close secret police surveillance, existed half-heartedly for a few months.[40]

Colonel Trzhetsiak's report to Governor Viren of 30 October 1910, fully corroborated by Parchevsky's observations, is a fair summing-up of the political facelessness of Kronstadt's 'civil society' in the pre-war period:

> Among Kronstadt's permanent inhabitants and workers the mood is quiet. People earlier noticed as politically unreliable, and now under observation, have shown no activity. I relate this to the absence of intelligent, energetic and experienced leaders and also to the cooling off of society towards the revolutionary movement.[41]

With the working class cowed and under close surveillance, and the intelligentsia philistine and apolitical, Kronstadt's revolutionary movement survived during the pre-war years in the small cells of training depots and ships and consisted mainly of sailors, naval petty-officers, instructors and medical personnel – Graf's 'semi-intellectuals' – who engaged in sporadic propaganda work and battled hard to maintain occasional contacts with organizers from Petersburg. They were constantly hounded by Colonel Trzhetsiak's small army of gendarmes, stool-pigeons, provocateurs, and part-time spies, including tea-house owners and publicans, and, driven deep underground, were prevented from organizing into larger units or 'collectives' with regular connections with revolutionary party organizations in Petersburg. It is an index of Trzhetsiak's and Viren's success that the existence and activities of these revolutionary cells are known chiefly from the Okhrana records and the trial reports of those apprehended.

For all that, Viren's system proved powerless to insulate the thousands of sailors who went abroad on the annual summer cruises of the Baltic Fleet. The police agents who tailed them could only notice and meticulously record the eager response of the Baltic squadrons' crews to the agitation of Socialist Revolutionary and Social Democratic activists who followed them from port to port and supplied them there with revolutionary literature.

One police agent's report of 27 April 1913 noted that the crews of the squadron which called in Hull, Marseilles and Alexandria met Russian emigré sailors (among them former crew members of the *Potemkin*) and received from them 'large quantities of party literature', including the SR journals *Za narod* and *Moriak*.[42] Another police spy, who tailed the Baltic squadron that visited Copenhagen in October 1912, defined the general mood of the Baltic Fleet as 'extremely oppositional'; many men, he thought, were 'conscious revolutionaries'. Altogether, he assessed the sailors as affording 'very fertile and responsive soil for propaganda', and noted that they took special interest in the agrarian question and complained of onerous service conditions. Those of the *Poliarnaia Zvezda* said they would have mutinied, if not for the respect and affection they had for their commander, Prince Viazemsky. Yet he found the sailors afraid of organizing because of the many arrests in the Baltic Fleet.[43]

Indeed, only a few months earlier Lenin had complained to Maxim Gorky, 'The Baltic Fleet is seething!' But, 'One could weep, there is no organization!'[44]

With the outbreak of World War I, Kronstadt was put on siege footing and the few civilians who were regarded as politically unreliable were deported to the mainland. That certainly did not solve the new problem created by the arrival in the Kronstadt First Baltic Depot of many ex-mutineers of 1905 and 1906, together with other 'unreliables', who, now remobilized, had on the orders of the chief commander of the Baltic Fleet, Admiral N. O. Essen, been drafted from their ships as 'depraved and propagandized'. The situation threw Lieutenant-General A. A. Manikovsky, commandant of the Kronstadt fortress, into despair, for now, he protested, 'the young sailors are, as a matter of course and from the very first days of their service, mixing freely with the most propagandized and dissolute men drafted from the ships into the Depot'.

'The rise in the revolutionary mood of the Petrograd working masses' was already being felt, Manikovsky warned, and Socialist Revolutionary and Social Democratic leaflets had been distributed 'calling the navy and the army to put an end to the war and to rise in armed insurrection'.

Viren's solution to the problem posed by the hundreds of political unreliables, among whom he noted many specialists and petty-officers, was to demote them all to the rank of sailors second class, to put the 'politicals' on floating barracks such as the former trans-